

## ENGLISH - ITS ORIGIN AND RELATION TO OTHER LANGUAGES

The history of English has been distinguished and divided into three different periods. The period from the arrival of the English in Britain down to about 1100 is usually called the Old English (O.E.) or Anglo-Saxon period. Following the earliest age, the period from 1100 to 1500 is called the Middle English (M.E.). From 1500 to the present day is finally called the Modern English. Although migration of the English people from the continent of Europe had started during the fifth and sixth centuries, very few records of English writing is available before 700. After about the year 700 there is an unbroken sequence of documents in English which speaks the nature of the language.

A convenient division of the history of English can be made by starting from 700 and ending at 1900. This division gives the following three periods of 400 years each:

O.E. - 700 - 1100

M.E. - 1100 - 1500

N.E. or Mod. E. - 1500 - 1900

The most outstanding literary work of the O.E. period is the epic poem "Beowulf", written about 700. The most significant work of the M.E. period is the poetry of Chaucer (died 1400) and, the remarkable works of Spenser and Shakespeare is followed by a continuous series of great writers till date. (Mod. E.)

Due to the gradual and imperceptible evolution of the language, a distinct line between any two ages can not be drawn. There must have been considerable overlapping between old and new, the older generation, more conservative, retaining the older forms of speech, the younger, more revolutionary adopting innovations. The changes in the language were not abrupt and sudden, rather they were gradual and imperceptible and not brought about deliberately by the speaker.

English is not the original language of England but, like the English people themselves, came over from the continent of Europe. But before the arrival of English people and their language, there had existed for several centuries a tongue belonging to a quite different family of languages, the Celtic group. This was spoken by the ancient Britons. During the Roman occupation of Britain (43-410), Latin must also have been widely used and both these earlier languages must have left their imprint on Old English. The history of the English language in England began during the middle of the fifth century when the invading Teutonic tribes from the continent began to conquer the Britons and imposed on the country their own speech and social organization.

These continental tribes came from different parts of Northern Europe. Their exact origin is yet to be located. The historians agree on at least two branches - the Angles and the Saxons - that they came from a region around what is now Northern Germany. But there was a third tribe, whose original home is less certain. These were the Jutes, who, according to the traditional view, migrated from Jutland. Most modern historians do not accept this explanation which is based merely on the resemblance of the two names - Jutes and Jutland. The Angles settled mainly in the north and central portions of England and gave their name both to the country and its language, the Saxons settled mainly in the south, the Jutes in Kent, the south-eastern corner of England, and in the Isle of Wight. Mingled with these three main races there may well have been representatives of several other tribes, such as the Frisians, who inhabited what is now part of Holland, and even possibly the Franks. Because of this mixed strain in the

English people the term Anglo-Saxon is not quite accurate. To make alignment with Middle English and Modern English it is more appropriate to employ Old English for this early stage of English language. This also has the advantage of being parallel to the terminology applied to other language, e.g. - Old English, Middle English and Modern English is parallel to Old French, Middle French and Modern French. It also suggests the continuity of the English language from its earliest stages. The Old English writers themselves used the term 'englisc' or 'englisc-gereord' - "the English language". The use of "Anglo-Saxon" to indicate the English people and their language prior to the Norman conquest arose at a relatively late period, in the 16th century.

One of the striking and far-reaching discoveries of the 19th century was that many languages show important resemblances in their structure, and that these features are to be explained, not by a process of borrowing but by descent from a common ancestor. Languages are like plants or animals, which may differ considerably today but may still exhibit certain characteristics pointing to a common origin or parent stock. By grouping together those similar characteristics various genera, families and classes can be drawn. Languages, too, may be divided into families. To indicate a common descent for a group of languages or a group of words, the term 'cognate' is used. Some idea of the evidence on which these relationships are based may be obtained from the following facts. The following common terms in some European languages show many striking resemblances and the possibility of their descent from a common ancestor cannot be ruled out.

English	German	Dutch	Swedish	Danish
one	ein	een	en	een
two	zwei	twee	tva	to
	(German z=ts)			
three	drei	drie	tre	tre
four	vier	vier	fyra	fire
	(German v=f)			
father	vater (v=f)	vader	fader	fader
mother	mutter	moeder	moder	moder
brother	bruder	broeder	broder	broder
				broder
sister		zuster	syster	soster
	schwester			

The following verbs show remarkable similarities-

	English	German	Dutch	Swedish	Danish
Infinitive	sing	singen	zingen	sjunga	syng
Past tense	sang	sang	zong	sjong	sang
Past participle	sung	gesungen	gezongen	sjungit	sungen
	(O.E.gesungen)				
	fish	fischen	visschen	fiska	fiske
	fished	fischte	vischte	fiskade	fiskede
	(ed-pron.t)				
	fished	gefischt	gevischt	fiskat	fisket

These and other similarities of an equally fundamental nature point to a common ancestry for this group of languages. They are called the Teutonic or Germanic group and are usually divided into three sub-groups, North Teutonic, East Teutonic and West

Teutonic. All these are descended from one parent language, which is called primitive Teutonic. The relationship can best be shown by the following table, which includes only the more important languages.

### PRIMITIVE TEUTONIC

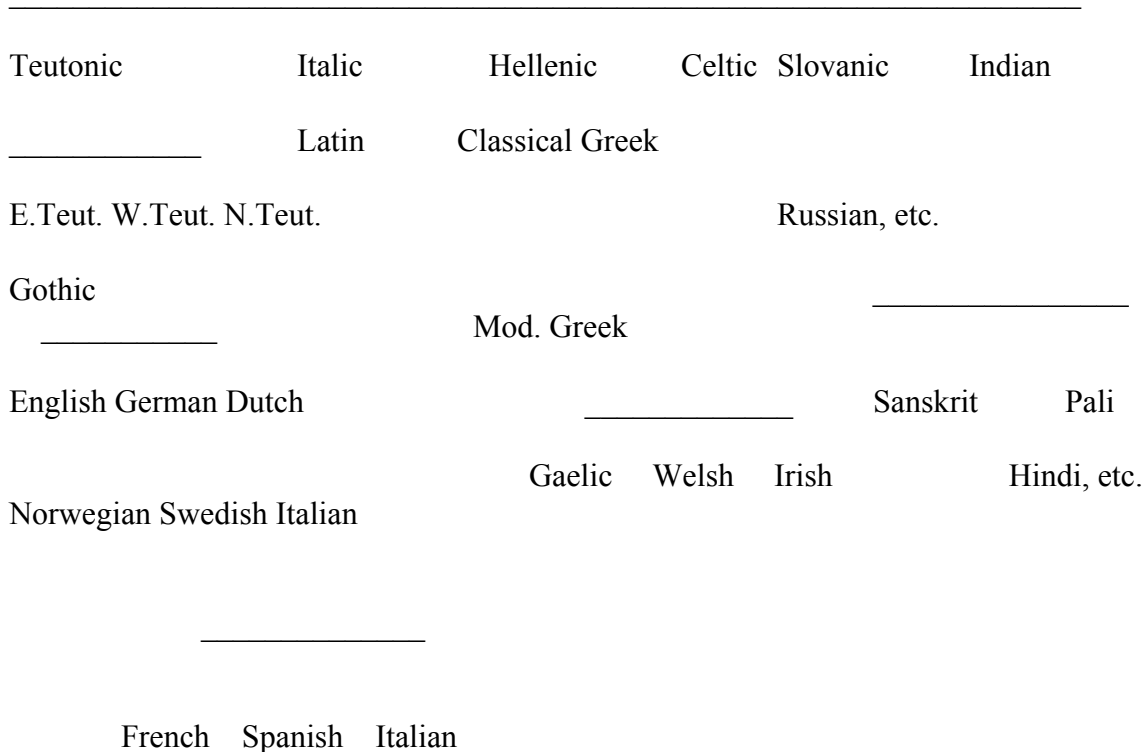
E. TEUTONIC		W. TEUTONIC		N. TEUTONIC		
Gothic (no longer spoken)	English	German	Dutch	Swedish	Danish	Norwegian

Even if we compare this Teutonic group with non-Teutonic languages, we discover equally remarkable resemblances. If we compare English (Teutonic group) words with their forms in Latin or Greek, which belong to two different branches, the Italic and the Hellenic respectively, we find a close proximity. We might also include French, which is a modern development from Latin, just as Modern English is from Old English.

<u>English</u>	<u>Latin</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>Greek</u>
one	unus	un	cf. oinos one(on dice)
two	duo	deux	duo
three	tres	trois	treis
father	pater	pere	pater
mother	mater	mere	meter
brother	frater	frere	phrater

These resemblances are too great to be merely accidental. A similar comparison with other languages, such as the Celtic group, would reveal more common features. Based on these evidences we can draw a more complete table to show the relationship between these larger linguistic units, the Teutonic, Italic, Hellenic, Celtic and other groups. There are altogether nine of these (or eleven including the recent discourses) and they include most of the European and some of the Indian languages. Hence, they are often called the Indo-European family of languages. Another term is the Aryan family. Aryan is thus not a racial but a linguistic label. The Indo-European or Aryan language family does not consist of a single racial unit, rather, it has always included many varied stocks. It is difficult to say when and where the parent language was originally spoken, except that it was sometime before 2000 BC; possibly 3000 or 4000 BC. Scholars thought that the original home of this ancestral language was in Asia, but the modern view is that it was in Northern or Central Europe.

## INDO-EUROPEAN OR ARYAN



[The above diagram shows the relationship of English to the other languages. Only the more important languages and groups have been included - the table is considerably reduced and simplified; only six of the nine (or eleven) branches are shown.]

It is explicit from this genealogical table that the nearest relatives to English are German and Dutch, the Scandinavian languages are closer too. Rather more distant are Greek and Latin (modern descendants French, Spanish and Italian), Celtic languages (including the ancient Britons) and modern Celtic forms of speech (Gaelic spoken in the Highlands of Scotland and in parts of Canada, especially Nova Scotia, the recently revived Irish language of Eire, and the Cymric of Wales).

There are many other groups of languages outside the Indo-European family. The Semitic group which includes Hebrew and Arabic, and another group including Chinese, and several besides these. Although they have gained a dominating position because of the political power and prestige of the nations that use them, Indo-European languages thus constitute only a fraction of the world's total linguistic resources.

Owing to the complexity of grouping the languages (derived from a common ancestor) and due to the non-availability of early documents, we cannot reach near the stage at which language actually originated. Though we may succeed in tracing languages back to the Indo-European parent-tongue and in reconstructing this primitive form of speech. Primitive Indo-European was a highly developed and complex instrument, for before its appearance man or sub man must have been articulate. The

development of speech is perhaps the most important advance in the history of mankind. There has been much speculation about the evolution of this means of communication. It is a mystery as we have very little evidence to guide us. Several theories have been forwarded from time to time by different scholars. They are as following:

1. Bow-Wow theory: supposes that words were first made from noises associated with natural objects. e.g.- the bark of a dog and the noise of the wind, actually became the names of the dog and the wind.
2. Ding-Dong theory: man reacted to the presence of various external phenomena by making specific noises. e.g.- a bell making "ding-dong".
3. Pooh-Pooh theory: words are originally spontaneous exclamations like our modern oh! ouch!, etc.
4. Hey Nanny Nanny theory: language originated in the emotional, song-like outpourings of primitive man, which were gradually canalized into speech. (Jespersen)

According to Paget, speech started not as sound but as gestures made by the hands. Later on, in the course of evolution, when man had to work continuously with his hands that they could no longer be used for gesticulating, he carried out the same movement with his tongue inside his mouth. This series of tongue position, acting on the exhaled and inhaled air, would naturally give rise to some definite sounds and would replace the gestures to convey the same meaning.

It is evident from all these explanations that the origin of speech sound is highly speculative. Language might have been originated due to some of these processes, and perhaps others that have not yet been discovered or at least considered.

[Reference to Anderson, Wallace and Stageb. Introducing readings on language 420.4, A 522a]